

ENGAGING YOUTH IN SERVICE

A RESOURCE NEWSLETTER TO UTAH VOLUNTEER CENTERS

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Youth Action Councils

Communities are increasingly recognizing youth as an untapped resource of ideas, energy, and enthusiasm, who can aid in community problem solving. Instead of being considered the root of society's problems, young people are gaining respect as a potential solution. As more and more people turn to structures and models which can help tap young people, Youth Action Councils are at the forefront. Youth Action Councils provide an opportunity for youth to be heard which can benefit youth, non-profit organizations, and the community at large.

What is a YAC?

- A group of young people joining hands for the common purpose of developing their individual leadership skills to strengthen their communities through volunteer service.
- Youth develop and lead all initiatives with the support of adult mentors.
- A youth action council is more than just a service club, because members seek to train and involve their peers in service leadership

Common goals of a YAC

- To instill a feeling of positive self-worth and esteem, to teach teamwork and respect for the rights and property of others, to promote community pride and eliminate potential negative influences among our future community leaders.
- To bring new energy and new ideas to an organization by including the untapped resources of youth.

- To educate the youth so that they can participate within the current governmental system and make a positive change in their community.
- To build positive community spirit, a sense of community and place among the youth involved.
- To bring together youth of diverse background who would not have otherwise gotten together.
- To give youth the opportunity to develop personal talents, including communication skills, leadership abilities, and interpersonal skills.

Youth Action Councils: Things to Consider

A YAC works to coordinate, to advise, and to activate peers and elders in issues affecting youth. YAC's act as a positive, influential, energetic voice in effecting policy, issues and, most importantly, solutions to America's problems. YAC's are community-wide, country-wide, statewide and nation-wide. To be successful, a YAC must be carefully thought out in everything from its purpose, to its role, to it's membership.

Some of the topics to keep in mind when creating a YAC include: membership, recruitment, application & selection, host organization, structure, funding and logistics.

Taken from Resources for Youth Action Councils, developed by the Points of Light Foundation

Utah's Youth Action Council

The Utah Youth Action Council (YAC) was created with the objective of unifying youth service across the state. Currently, the YAC is comprised of one representative from each of the six teams who attended the Utah Youth Summit in 2003. Each team is responsible for hosting a regional youth summit in their respective areas, prior to July 1, 2004. Summits will vary in each region, but they all include skills training, service projects, and fun!

The YAC representative serves as the main point of contact for the youth service teams and their regional summits. Because of the large distance between teams, the YAC communicates through monthly reports, newsletters, email and conference calls.

The YAC is supported by the Utah Commission on Volunteers.

Utah County Youth Service Council

The United Way of Utah County sponsors the Utah County Youth Service Council. This unique council is made up of service-oriented representatives from every Utah County high school.

Their mission is to promote effective volunteer service by serving as a working organization for the coordination of service among the youth organizations of Utah County.

Each month, the Utah County Youth Service Council gathers together for an information and idea-sharing meeting, where they are able to gain greater perspectives on effective service activities while they are trained to be service leaders within their schools. Youth Service Council members also collaborate on a monthly service project at one of a variety of local nonprofit or public agencies.

To find out how to strengthen or incorporate a youth program in your area, contact Utah's YES Ambassador, Kristi Tanner, today!

This newsletter is published by the Utah Commission on Volunteers.

Individuals who receive it are invited to share the newsletter with others who are interested in youth service and volunteerism in Utah.

For more information contact Kristi at (888)755-UTAH or yes@utahspromise.org.

Brigham City Youth Volunteer Council

The Brigham City Volunteer Center is engaging youth in service. Since 1998, they have been coordinating a Youth Volunteer Council. The council is open to 9th-12th grade students who have a desire to serve their community.

Sharon Cassidy, Director of the Brigham City Volunteer Center, knows how important it is to encourage youth to volunteer during their teen years. "The seeds of service are planted when youth spend time planning for and being involved in service," says Cassidy.

Brittney Barton, a high-school senior and co-chair of the Executive Board, was invited by a friend to attend one of the service activities. Brittney recommends the Youth Volunteer Council to anyone. "There is no negative side to being involved," says Barton. "The activities are lot of fun and it's a great way to meet new people."

How it began

The council was initially funded through a Learn and Serve grant. Their first activity was a project for National Youth Service Day, with 17 youth in attendance. Today the membership list has grown to include 155 youth, with approximately 20 youth participating in each activity.

How it works

Members of the council are recruited through the local high school. The Youth Volunteer Council is included in the list of extracurricular activities sent to students in their pre-registration packets. In the last two years, more youth have signed up for the YVC than any other club. All high school students are welcome to attend, including those with disabilities.

In the month of May, individuals are interviewed and selected to serve on the Executive Board of the council for the upcoming school year. The 16-member board includes co-chairs who take turns conducting meetings, two representatives from each grade, and publicity and membership committees. Meetings are held monthly and are open to all members.

Activities are advertised through a monthly mailing of the calendar of events. The students themselves are often the best recruiters. Everyone brings their friends, and very seldom do they have a service activity without someone new attending.

How they serve

At least two service activities are planned for each month; however, this past December witnessed a whopping seven activities. During the monthly meetings, the youth sign up for the projects they will be able to attend. The Volunteer Center partners with 26 agencies, so service activities are many and varied. Some of their favorite activities have been with LINC, the Life-skills Independent Need Center for mentally disabled adults. The youth have assisted with crafts, swimming parties and holiday activities. They have been there so often that the youth know the residents by name.

They have also put in many hours at the food bank, wrapped presents for Angel Tree, painted the kitchen at the family support center, planted 350 tree seedlings at Willard Bay, and insured the success

of the Awesome Adventure summer parks and recreation program. The list could go on and on!

How to recognize their efforts

Each May the Volunteer Center hosts a recognition evening. The awards given are not extravagant, but they do have meaning. (ie. giving a bat and a ball with the phrase "Thank you for being on the ball and coming to bat for the Youth Volunteer Council".)

The recognition evening also includes a video, showcasing the activities and efforts of the youth in the recent year. The video is also used as a tool when approaching city governments, county commissioners, or other potential sponsors.

Many of the youth have earned the Presidential Student Service Award. Cassidy usually forwards the certificates and pins to the high school, so the student can receive recognition from their peers. This also helps to get the word out about the Council to other students.

How everyone benefits

Trends in volunteering show that young people who volunteer as youth are more likely to volunteer as adults. This trend holds true for graduates of the Youth Volunteer Council. Some have gone on to become VISTAs. Others are active with campus service organizations.

All of the youth leave the council with a greater understanding of the problems and issues facing their community. Cassidy says, "They often know even more than their parents. Giving service gives them a broad spectrum of the problems, as well as the solutions."

"The big key for kids to want to be involved is to make service fun," comments Cassidy. "They come because it's fun, but they feel good because of what they have done. It's a win-win situation."



Members of the Brigham City Youth Volunteer Council are pictured here building a rock wall for Habitat for Humanity.